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SUBJECT: BAHRAIN: PROGRESS ON TIP SHORT-TERM ACTION PLAN

REF: A. MANAMA 696
 [B.](#) MANAMA 548
 [C.](#) STATE 81216

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Introduction

[11.](#) (SBU) The following describes actions by the GOB since the end of the reporting period for the 2007 TIP Report, including the 60-day period of the Short-Term Action Plan following Bahrain's placement on Tier 3. In addition to activities initiated entirely by the GOB, International Organization for Migration (IOM) representatives met with government officials May 27-30 and conducted a needs assessment, leading to strengthened cooperation in several areas to combat trafficking. Over the next 9-12 months, there are several activities planned through this extensive GOB/IOM collaboration with the goal of reaching and training over 200 GOB officials and representatives from civil society. The discussion below has been organized by topic as outlined in the Short-Term Action Plan (ref C), and nearly all references to IOM relate to the USG-funded IOM program that will be conducted in coming months.

Criminal Prosecutions

[12.](#) (SBU) Until the passage of the comprehensive anti-trafficking law (see para 6), Post expects to see the GOB continue to prosecute traffickers under laws against forced prostitution, facilitating prostitution or managing an establishment which facilitates prostitution, and forced labor. Limitations in the judicial case management system make specific identification of trafficking cases difficult. However, the Ministry of Justice is in the process of automating the system, thereby making identification easier in the future. The GOB/IOM collaboration includes deploying an informational technology (IT) expert on counter-trafficking database design and management. The expert will conduct an assessment of the data collection/management process currently in place. The expert will then work with IT employees within the Ministry of Justice and the Public Prosecution Office to design and implement a database to monitor and report on prosecutions of traffickers with the ultimate goal of producing monthly reports for interministerial task force members.

[13.](#) (SBU) In mid-July, two Eastern European women (from Ukraine and Belarus) escaped from an exploitative work

situation, in which they were allegedly forced into prostitution, and reported their situation to the Bahraini police. The women had reportedly been working as waitresses in a three-star hotel restaurant and were also forced to perform sexual favors for clients. According to the women, they, along with approximately 20 other Eastern European women, were transported to and from their place of work each day under the watchful eyes of security guards and locked in their accommodations when not working. After taking their information and identifying them as victims of trafficking, the police took them to the government shelter for protection. IOM assisted with their repatriation and within a few days the women had left Bahrain. PolOff followed up with the Public Prosecution on the case and found that the Public Prosecution investigation was ongoing and that arrest warrants had been issued for two Bahraini men, including a brother of the hotel owner. Although the two men had departed the country before the arrest warrants had been issued, the Public Prosecution generated an Interpol note, and there is hope the men will be caught and brought to justice. The Public Prosecution also passed information to the vice squad so that they could look into the hotel's activities.

¶4. (SBU) In early July, a Bahraini hotel owner was arrested in a sting operation along with six foreign women who were alleged to have been prostitutes. One of the women was identified to be in her early teens and was taken to the shelter as a victim of forced prostitution. She was cared for at the shelter and then traveled home. The other women were questioned and were determined to have been working of their own accord. The hotel owner was arrested, charged with the felony of facilitating the rape of a minor, among other prostitution-related charges, and is due to appear in court.

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Identification Protocol

¶5. (SBU) IOM will bring in a high-level expert consultant to help the interministerial task force better understand the entire victim identification process to address shortcomings in victim identification in Bahrain. The expert will strengthen the task force by developing an effective work plan and a monitoring/reporting system using database statistics on court decisions and sentences, in addition to working with the group to develop procedures for the assisted voluntary return of victims. IOM will also offer two training programs for 50 people selected from the government shelter staff, community center staff, and civil society to include topics such as TIP identification and awareness, shelter referral procedures, psycho-social counseling, and center management, among others.

Anti-Trafficking Legislation, Policy

¶6. (SBU) Comprehensive anti-trafficking draft legislation has been completed and fully approved by the Cabinet. It was forwarded to the Council of Representatives (COR) in May for further action. The COR adjourned May 31, beginning its summer recess. The COR will take up discussion of the legislation when it reconvenes, likely in October.

¶7. (U) The GOB granted a comprehensive amnesty August 1 (ref A) to illegal expatriates, permitting them to regularize their status with their employer and the GOB or return home without having to pay any overstay penalty fines. Significantly, the amnesty includes expatriates who entered the country and searched for work on tourist "visit" visas, one population most vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking. The government seems not only very keen to clean up the labor market and regularize all illegal expats,

but also to crack down on abuses by influential Bahrainis, who have allegedly been allowed to bring in hundreds of individuals on tourist visas only to turn them loose to look for work in order to pay off debts from money paid to recruiters or middlemen.

Government Shelter Access

¶8. (SBU) The shelter referral policy was somewhat stringent when the shelter first opened, relying entirely on referrals from law enforcement officials who encountered cases of abuse and trafficking. Post has facilitated meetings between the director of the government-run shelter and both civil society groups and source-country embassy staff members. Through these meetings, the shelter director has come to understand more fully the varied situations and issues faced by victims.

The director has welcomed alternate referral mechanisms through direct contact by embassy officials or NGO representatives. To date the shelter has served 30 expatriate women who have experienced abuse.

Law Enforcement Training

¶9. (SBU) In a GOB/IOM jointly-sponsored event, IOM conducted a two-week training in January 2007 specifically designed for law enforcement officers. Officers from the immigration service, the vice squad, judges, public prosecutors, shelter staff, and other government officials participated in the training. IOM has included in its work plan of upcoming activities another training for 30 officials in law enforcement, the Ministries of Labor and Justice, and prosecutors from the Public Prosecution.

Public Awareness

¶10. (SBU) On May 29, Bahrain convened a symposium on trafficking at which it brought together nearly 100 people, the largest number of local stakeholders ever assembled on the issue of trafficking. Attendees included embassy representatives from source countries (Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Thailand and the Philippines), members of women's rights groups and other civil society groups,

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government officials, members of parliament, and other concerned citizens. Each government ministry that plays a part in combating trafficking presented the steps it has taken to confront the problem. In addition, both IOM and prominent local NGO the Migrant Worker Protection Society, presented the capabilities they bring to combat trafficking.

¶11. (SBU) The IOM work plan includes working with Ministry of Social Development staff and source-country embassies to develop updated informational brochures for workers to receive as they enter the country and materials for families who hire expatriate workers to educate them about the proper treatment of domestic workers. IOM will conduct a Train the Trainers program that will educate housewives who have expatriate housemaids to make them more conscious of appropriate treatment and conditions for domestic workers. IOM will also conduct an awareness training for 30 journalists from the Arabic press with the intent of increasing the exposure of the Bahraini public to trafficking issues and the battle against TIP.

Post Conducted Awareness Activity

¶12. (SBU) Post hosted a group concerned about trafficking

July 30, including human rights activists, a journalist, and a source-country diplomat, to view the Frontline video entitled "Sex Slaves." The event was very positively received, and the discussion following the video was involved and informative for all, bringing the focus onto Bahrain and its trafficking problem. The journalist talked about many women involved in prostitution in Bahrain whom she has interviewed for investigative articles she has written. In her experience, nearly all had chosen to practice prostitution for the financial benefits. The diplomat from the Thai Embassy explained that most of the women who go to the embassy for help are women who are not well-educated and are tricked into leaving Thailand chasing promises of making large sums of money. Post plans to hold similar events in the future.

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